

CABINET – 21 JANUARY 2026

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Public Questions

1. Geoff Elner

Question:

I would like to know why the winter preparedness plan was not followed this year. The Gritting team as usual did a good job other than that the plan failed. Who is responsible for initiating the plan, and want to know the reason why it didn't happen. Why were the council not prepared for winter weather, snow and ice, why were so many salt boxes empty, why had they not been refilled from the previous winter, who should have monitored the levels, but didn't. Various Shropshire Councillors have acknowledged the plan wasn't followed and given conflicting statements as to why, some have said its on oversight, too many inexperienced new councillors and portfolio holders. Some have said the policy has changed and Shropshire Council will no longer refill salt boxes, existing boxes will not be replaced and no new bins will be supplied and town and parish councils will have to buy them themselves. When was this agreed? devolution of services is only being discussed and currently there is no agreement. What are the facts, surely keeping roads safe is an essential responsibility of SC. Residents in rural areas were unable to help themselves because they were not given the tools and equipment to enable them to do so. Fix my street requests to refill bins were not actions in time. Overall it was simply not good enough. Please could whoever is in charge resolve matters for this winter

Response:

I would like to start by just reiterating that The Met Office issued an Amber Weather Warning for Shropshire predicting a “high likelihood of significant impact and of widespread disruption.

However, in spite of this amber warning, I am pleased to say that the response from the council’s highways team was widely acknowledged as being extremely effective, which played a big part in keeping our communities and road users safe.

In response to the question, Shropshire Council has an established Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan, which sets out how we deliver what is a core front line council service. I can confirm that we have approximately 2,400 grit bins at key locations across the county, all of which were visited and re-stocked prior to the winter period. All of these were photographed before and after re-filling, with all actions recorded in our asset management system. During the course of this severe weather period, we had two dedicated teams refilling grit bins across the county and we have re-filled 844 grit bins since the start of November. I would also like to confirm that grit bins that meet the criteria will not be removed and any new requests will be considered in line with the assessment criteria, as is the case at the present time. I note there were no specific locations referenced in the question, if these can

be provided, along with dates and times, we can look into the specific concerns raised.

I hope this illustrates that there has been no change in approach, if anything winter preparedness has been strengthened. We always review the winter service following each winter period and will be capturing any concerns and feeding them into that process. We recognise there is always room for improvement and learning opportunities, but I would like to stress that we received widespread praise for the winter maintenance service this year and I would like to thank all the staff who worked long hours in cold and difficult conditions to keep people safe.

2. John Palmer

Question:

Shropshire Council's Strategic Risks grid, due its biannual update in February, looks to have a glaring omission?

Nowhere does another pandemic explicitly feature on it: its absence is telling.

Is it complacency, optimism bias, groupthink, 'Shropshire exceptionalism' of the Cabinet for not raising this with current management?

The recent Module 2 reports of the COVID-19 Inquiry, published 20 November 2025, analyse the crimes of "too little, too late" by most in authority.

At least 700 people died of COVID-19 in Shropshire (source: Director of Public Health's Annual Report, 2020 and 2021).

Where's the local accountability for what happened? Have local decision-makers of the time, Conservatives, ever publicly apologised and expressed regret?

The local health infrastructure has been in crisis for years, and still is; and Shropshire Council's decline in staff numbers across a broad range of crucial disciplines does not bode well, come the time?

Especially if we were to face an increased poisonous influence from the anti-vax, anti-lockdown, let-it-rip, divisive minority of the far right?

Response:

Thank you for your question.

We recognise the profound impacts of COVID19 on our communities and we continue to take pandemic preparedness seriously.

In July 2023—following discussion at the June 2023 Strategic Risk Workshop with the Executive Management Team—the Council archived the specific COVID19 strategic risk because, at that point, COVID19 was no longer assessed as having a strategic impact on our ability to deliver services.

This does not mean pandemic risk is ignored. By definition, the Strategic Risk Register focuses on risks that could fundamentally affect the Council's ability to achieve priorities, deliver statutory duties, or maintain critical services. We continue to monitor and review the risks regularly including review if pandemic threat was to become more imminent, a strategic risk could be reviewed with a view to reinstate the strategic risk due to the increased likelihood of impact on staff, services and finances. In the meantime, we to put in place controls to prepare for future pandemics; we continue to horizon-scan, drawing on national and international guidance, emerging research and advice from professional risk management bodies, so that our controls and our plans remain current. This includes learning from findings from The COVID enquiry which covers decision-making by the UK government. Operationally, we have a multiagency rapid response group, which we can stand up at short notice for any new or emerging infections. Our health partners have commissioned services to provide outbreak response capacity—including swabbing, prophylaxis and treatment where appropriate.

Pandemic-related risks are currently managed through our operational and emergency planning arrangements rather than through the strategic register, reflecting how the risk is best owned and controlled day to day. We have recently updated our Pandemic Plans with partners and we have a Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Health Protection Strategy (with the detailed pandemic response covered by the pandemic plan), and we continue to run programmes to increase vaccination uptake across our communities.

Importantly, pandemic/novel infectious disease remains the top risk on the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) community risk register and is also acknowledged as a top tier national risk. We have maintained a Health Protection Cell function which manages infectious diseases locally and was put in place as a result of the pandemic increasing our resilience. We continue to test plans and strengthen readiness.

In summary, while COVID19 no longer appears as a discrete strategic risk, pandemic risk is actively and rigorously managed through the most appropriate mechanisms—our operational/emergency planning and the multi-agency resilience arrangements—backed by regular exercising and continuous horizon scanning.

During the pandemic Shropshire was following national instructions regarding how to manage the Covid 19 Pandemic. In terms of recognising the impact on local communities in the same Annual Report It was clear this has been a challenging and difficult year, and from 01 April 2020 to 17 January 2022, 703 people lost their lives to COVID-19 in Shropshire. These deaths are not numbers, they are people who were loved by their families and friends, and those families and friends are now living with that loss. We also recognise the teams and colleagues across the Council and our partners in the public and private sector and our voluntary and community sector who worked tirelessly during that period.

3. Christopher James

Question:

Up to the end of 2025 were any road safety audits carried out for the Shrewsbury station gyratory project and, if not, why not?

Response:

I can confirm:

The formal Road Safety Audits on the Station Gyratory were undertaken as follows:

Stage 1 – October 2023

Stage 2 – February 2024

Interim Stage 3 – Instructed December 2025 and dates from the independent provider are awaited.

Road safety audits (RSAs) typically involve four main stages, conducted at key project milestones:

Stage 1 (preliminary design),

Stage 2 (detailed design),

Stage 3 (post-construction)

Stage 4 (post-opening monitoring, usually 12 months after opening) to review collision data and performance, with interim audits possible at any time for modifications. These audits use independent teams to identify and mitigate potential hazards for all road users throughout a project's lifecycle.

4. Megan Frost

Question:

Given the importance of swimming facilities for both physical & mental health, safety, and community wellbeing, can the Cabinet explain the specific reasons that have led to the decision to pause the new swimming pool project, including what factors have changed since last month when it passed through the Scrutiny Committee and what evidence has been used to justify this pause? What criteria will determine whether and when the project proceeds?

Response:

Thank you for your question. Since before the paper went to Scrutiny, I and many others have had concerns around the proposed options for financing the project. We carried out various due diligence checks, and in discussion with Cabinet have concluded that the current finance options, described and visualised at 5.7 – 5.9 in the Scrutiny report, are not affordable for the Council at this time.

Our position remains that the rationale for the project still stands and the proposed scheme is strong, however we must accept that this authority cannot currently afford the revenue implications of the borrowing needed to cover the cost of building the facility.

For this scheme to progress, the Council is likely to require a significant amount of the costs, if not all, to be funded via external grant funding, available CIL receipts and community fundraising. Clearly the price tag for this makes it a steep hill to climb, however anything is possible.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the hard work of all the staff and stakeholders involved in bringing the project closer than it has ever been.